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C O N F I D E N T I A L MONROVIA 000765

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/01/2018  
TAGS: PGOV PREL SOCI PHUM LI  
SUBJECT: LIBERIAN WAR CRIMES COURT ADVOCATE DETAINED FOR  
FIFTH TIME

Classified By: CDA Brooks A. Robinson for reasons 1.4 B and D.

¶1. (SBU) The National Security Agency (NSA) arrested Morlu, leader of the "Forum for the Establishment of a War Crimes Court in Liberia," September 27 for calling President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf a "rebel" on local television September ¶26. Morlu was held at NSA headquarters until the President ordered him released September 29. After Morlu's release, the President's spokesman said the GOL had "no intention of infringing on anyone's rights," but also told Morlu to realize that "freedom of speech goes with certain responsibilities." This is the fifth time Morlu has been arrested since he started advocating for a war crimes court, but he has never been formally charged or sent to court on any of those occasions.

¶2. (SBU) Morlu set up the Forum in 2006 after the arrest of Charles Taylor. He has since become the public face of a growing grassroots movement to try all former Liberian warlords in a war crimes court. The Forum staged a demonstration in Monrovia in 2007 during the visit of former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan but was kept at bay by UNMIL and Liberia National Police officers. The Forum also planned to demonstrate during the February 2008 visit of President Bush but Morlu was preemptively arrested and then released the following day. The group was planning another demonstration in Monrovia October 15 but has thus far been unable to obtain any of the necessary permits to demonstrate.

¶3. (SBU) Morlu was a member of Taylor's National Patriotic Party (NPP) but has since become an active member of the opposition party Congress for Democratic Change (CDC). CDC called for Morlu's immediate release during this latest detention and is continuing to protest the motives and conditions he faced during his detention. (NOTE: Morlu claims that he held in solitary confinement without food, water, light, or access to any visitors. He also said he was subjected to threatening remarks by NSA officials. END NOTE.)

¶4. (C) The Liberian press has been covering Morlu's latest arrest extensively, but has only made a few references to the fact that the head of NSA, Fomba Sirleaf, is President Sirleaf's step-son. In fact, Fomba Sirleaf was out of the country at the time of the latest arrest. One political cartoon in September 30's Observer makes light of the fact that Morlu's NSA arrest could have been a personal vendetta for insulting Fomba's mother. A mother pats her crying son's head and says "Son, I told you no fighting." The boy gets up and says, "No! He cuss my ma. So I wan deal with him!"

¶5. (C) COMMENT: There is certainly enough indication that Morlu's backers are using him to embarrass the government. However, Morlu's repeated arrests and detentions without formal charges flies in the face of the government's efforts to improve the judicial process and the tolerance of freedom of speech in Liberia. NSA needs to clarify its role as a law enforcement agency. Although it has a legitimate role in gathering intelligence on threats against the state, it needs to strengthen its ability to bring cases to prosecution, or leave that effort to others. The GOL has stated it is not

interested in the establishment of a war crimes court and wants to see the ongoing Truth and Reconciliation Commission reach a meaningful conclusion, but the publicity surrounding Morlu's arrests have only served to fuel discussion on the issue.

ROBINSON